CLAIMS:

1. A spinal rod approximator device for moving a spinal rod into the rod-receiving member of a spinal implant, the device comprising:

an implant-gripping member having a distal portion that extends in a direction substantially transverse to a proximal portion, the distal portion being adapted to engage the rod-receiving member of a spinal implant;

a rod-engaging member slidably coupled to the implant-gripping member at a position proximal to the implant-gripping member, the rod-engaging member having a distal portion that extends transverse to a proximal portion; and

a pusher member coupled to at least one of the implant-gripping member and the rod-engaging member such the pusher member is effective to move at least one the implant-gripping member and the rod-engaging member with respect to one another.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein the distal portion of the rod-engaging member comprises opposed arms each having a rod-receiving recess formed on a distally-facing surface thereof.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein the distal portion of the implant-gripping member comprises a U-shaped member having opposed legs that are adapted to be positioned under a distal end of a rod-receiving member of a spinal implant.

4. The device of claim 3, wherein a proximal facing surface of the U-shaped member is substantially concave.

5. The device of claim 3, wherein at least a portion of the U-shaped member is substantially planar.

6. The device of claim 1, wherein the distal portion of the rod-engaging member comprises opposed arms, and wherein the distal portion of the implant-gripping member comprises a U-shaped member having opposed legs, the opposed arms of the rod-engaging member being

spaced apart from one another by a distance that is greater than a distance between the opposed legs of the implant-gripping member.

7. The device of claim 1, wherein the pusher member is fixedly, but freely-rotatably coupled to one of the implant-gripping member and the rod-engaging member, and it is threadably mated to the other one of the implant-gripping member and the rod-engaging member such that rotation of at least a portion of the pusher member is effective to move at least one of the implant-gripping member and the rod-engaging member with respect to one another.

8. The device of claim 13, wherein the pusher member comprises a threaded rod extending through a threaded bore formed in a portion of the implant-gripping member, and wherein the threaded rod includes a distal end mated to a portion of the rod-engaging member.

9. The device of claim 8, wherein the threaded rod includes a handle member formed on a proximal end thereof.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein the pusher member is fixedly, but freely-rotatably coupled to the implant-gripping member and it is releasably, threadably mated to the rod-engaging member.

11. The device of claim 10, further comprising a release mechanism adapted to release a threaded engagement between the pusher member and the rod-engaging member.

12. A spinal rod approximator, comprising:

first and second components slidably coupled to one another and adapted for relative movement along a sliding axis, the first component including an implant-gripping portion offset from the sliding axis and being adapted to engage the rod-receiving member of a spinal implant, and the second component including a rod-engaging portion offset from the sliding axis and being adapted to engage a spinal rod to move the spinal rod toward the rod-receiving member of the spinal implant being engaged by the implant-gripping portion.

13. The spinal rod approximator of claim 12, further comprising an actuator member coupled to each of the first and second components and effective to move at least one of the components with respect to the other component.

14. The spinal rod approximator of claim 13, wherein the actuator member comprises an elongate rod having a threaded portion adapted to threadably couple to the first component, and having a portion fixedly, but freely-rotatably mated to the second component, such that rotation of the actuator member is effective to move the second component with respect to the first component.

15. The device of claim 14, further comprising a release mechanism adapted to release the threaded engagement between the actuator member and the first component.

16. The spinal rod approximator of claim 12, wherein the implant-gripping portion and the rod-engaging portion each extend in a direction substantially transverse to the sliding axis.

17. A method for approximating a spinal rod into a rod-receiving member of a spinal implant, comprising:

providing a spinal rod approximator device having an implant-gripping member and a rod-engaging member slidably coupled to one another and each having a distal portion that is offset from a sliding axis of the device;

engaging a rod-receiving member of a spinal implant disposed in a patient's vertebra with the implant-gripping member;

engaging a spinal rod spaced apart from the rod-receiving member of a spinal implant with the rod-engaging member; and

actuating the spinal rod approximator device to move the spinal rod engaged by the rod-engaging member into the rod-receiving member of the spinal implant engaged by the implant-gripping member.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein a distal portion of each of the rod-engaging member and the implant-gripping member extend in a direction substantially transverse to the sliding axis.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the distal portion of the rod-engaging member comprises opposed arms, and wherein the distal portion of the implant-gripping member comprises a U-shaped member having opposed legs, the opposed arms of the rod-engaging member being spaced apart from one another by a distance that is greater than a distance between the opposed legs of the implant-gripping member.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein the distal portion of the rod-engaging member comprises opposed arms each having a rod-receiving recess formed on a distally-facing surface thereof.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein the distal portion of the implant-gripping member comprises a U-shaped member having opposed legs that are adapted to be positioned under a distal end of a rod-receiving member of a spinal implant.

22. The method of claim 17, wherein the device further comprises an actuator member coupled to each of the rod-engaging member and the implant-gripping member such that the actuator member is effective to move at least one of the rod-engaging member and the implant-gripping member along the sliding axis.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the actuator member comprises a threaded rod extending through a threaded bore formed in a portion of the implant-gripping member, and wherein the threaded rod includes a distal end mated to a portion of the rod-engaging member.